INTERVIEWEE: ED PEARL

INTERVIEWER: Victor Cohen

DATE: March 22, 2009

EP: I wanted to get him on tape.

VC: Guy Carawan?

EP: Yeah. I just asked Ayana if she would film it, with Paula asking the questions, which happened.

VC: Paula?

EP: Paula Mazur. She did some really great stuff around the Bakersfield _____. She won Emmys for that.

VC: Wow! Good for her. Just before I forget. Is today the 22nd?

EP: Either the 21st or the 22nd, I'm not sure. Today is the 22nd, yeah.

VC: Okay. Just for posterity. It's the 22nd of March 2009, Sunday.

EP: So anyway, then we simply decided to – Jerry wanted to interview other people while they still were around. And Paula dropped out, for a variety of reasons, mainly because the industry fell down. All of her contacts with Showtime and HBO and KCET were simply not funding documentaries. They would take a finished documentary, and that was the whole base on which she could do it, and she was confidently – but all of her job, that wasn't just me, all of her stuff. So she went back to being associate producer for other people, et cetera. And, frankly, had a period of three or four months when she just couldn't do anything. Sort of a temporary nervous breakdown, you might say. But her whole world collapsed. No problems between us, but that's just why she pulled out.

So anyway, we started filming people just with Jerry and Ayana and myself asking questions, and them doing the filming. Jerry being the nominal interviewer. And he's excellent at – Jerry would be absolutely excellent to be on that thing. I mean, he's funny, he knows the Ash Grove, he knows me extremely well, and I feel very comfortable with him. So all of that. And he's great asking other people. He can really get people talking. He's the one who asked – Ry said, "So that place." And Jerry said, "What place?" "At the Ash Grove." And then I think Jerry pointed to me and said, "With Ed." I think that's how that sentence came out, Ry picking up on all of Jerry's cues because Ry would just be talking about "the place" because who has to name it? Everyone knows the place. I mean, everyone in that room. There were four of us. Of course, nobody else knows what he's talking about, but – anyway, so that was him.

VC: So he left the Ash Grove –

EP: Yeah, to head – he actually – I had the Teatro Campesino, with Luis Valdez and Danny Valdez and – what's his name, who won the – oh, God.

VC: Wasn't it Luis Valdez?

EP: No. What's the name of the person who – the Sleepy Hollow. What's the name of that –

VC: You mean Sleepy Lagoon?

EP: Sleepy Lagoon, yeah. Real famous actor. James Olmos, Jimmy Olmos. He was there. They were around for a couple of weeks, and they did basically the same thing that the Freedom Singers did five years earlier. So Jerry got – I think maybe it was '69. It doesn't matter. About five or six years earlier. Jerry wound up deciding to go to work for the farm workers. And he is extremely capable, a very

good businessman. And somehow he wound up – when he left, he very quickly was the head of the entire grape boycott in Florida, a very interesting state, with Latinos and blacks and, I'm sure, merciless exploitation and the rest of it. And working with Cubans and Jews and – you name it. I mean, all of that. He became totally fluent in Spanish very quickly. So he was talking to the –

Then Cesar moved him up to New York, so he was the head of the New York State grape boycott. Again, if anything, I couldn't think of two more complicated states to be part of. I mean, California would be easy because we've been – this is the home of the farm workers, but back there, whatever, even competing probably with other organizations that weren't friendly. The Teamsters, for example, or whatever. He's a person of ideas, too, and he actually is a person who initiated and funded the farm worker retirement communities, the housing thing. He's one of my really close friends.

So Jerry, being Ayana's step-dad and all of that, basically – with me, there's a three party producer, three of us. Me, Ayana, and Jerry are the producers. But I'm not an active producer, I'm an associate producer.

VC: (laughs)

EP: No, seriously, because –

VC: All those titles are so funny, I don't really know _____.

EP: Except it means something. In other words, they even, for a while, had me going out of the room while they would ask people questions that people might be inhibited in answering in front of me, which was okay except it was brought starkly into relief when they interviewed Taj separately from me, and then I went in. And it turns out that without me they didn't know a lot of stuff, that Taj was not opening

to them, but he opened to me as soon as I came in. He stood up and he said he wanted to say publicly that what he's become is due to me. I mean, basically he gave a really nice – a speech that I'd never –

Then a whole bunch of people started coming there, delivering amps, this and that. What are we going to do? So then Taj had to leave fairly quickly. Basically, the interview of Taj, what we get on film, is really from a very brief time.

VC: That's too bad.

EP: Yeah. So that was a mistake. They should have first had me be part of it, and then interview him alone, if they wanted to. It should have been reversed. So, things like that. Just live and learn sort of thing. Anyway, so that's who Jerry is. We talk at least once a week.

VC: Is he in L.A. now?

EP: No. He lives in Santa Cruz. He was a farm worker in Salinas, and then he – his mother – well, after his dad died here, then somehow his mother moved up near Santa Cruz. And because she's now in her nineties – she lives down the block from Jerry in Santa Cruz. They fixed it up and all that.

VC: That's such a pretty little town.

EP: Yeah. He has an interesting history, which I didn't know for a long time. I mean, not that it was any secret, but his grandfather owned the biggest restaurant in Germany, in Berlin, and on the same block as the Gestapo. They're Jewish. They're Slovakian Jews. Crusava[?] or something is their real name, not Kay.

VC: I was going to say, Kay's not particularly a Jewish name.

EP: Jerry has spent a lot of time going back and forth to Germany and talking with people, and so on, that are still living. I think everyone by now is dead. But he did that. And here in the United States, there were some people in New York, whatever, that knew them or were just relatives, or whatever. So to do a book on the family. So they were sent to Terezinstadt, which was the one concentration camp that they let the Red Cross in. And his grandmother and other people perished or were sent off to whatever.

But his grandfather actually survived, and before the Nazis took over he gave the restaurant to his headwaiter, who then gave it back to him after the war. So then he reopened the restaurant. (laughs) And he never left Berlin. That's where he'd be like me in Los Angeles. His grandfather had farms, so all the food that people were eating at this amazing restaurant was grown by Mr. Crusava, or whatever his name was. And there was some money, obviously. There's money involved.

His dad actually was one of the first distributors of video cameras in the United States, and he did video tapes – this is something Jerry was ashamed of. He actually did a few films, like of Dan Blocker and Andy Griffith, and friends with Brownie and Sonny, and so on and so forth. And then afterwards, because nobody told him not to, he just erased them over and put on something else. And then he died. At any rate, so there's no point in – so it's just one of those things. You have the only on record story. Just keep it for yourself, because he's really pissed at his dad for doing that. (laughs) Gunther was a very nice man, but he didn't get what he was –

VC: It happens. It happens.

EP: Yeah.

VC: I wanted to ask you – if you feel like it. The last time we were talking about the Ash Grove, we had come right up to I think the second fire, where the Cubans had come in and held everybody up.

EP: Yeah.

VC: I wanted to kind of pick up there. What happened after that? That was in –

EP: That was in '72, so there was a year, year and a half after that. I think at that point I started drinking. It was just a lot of pressure, and Jerry was gone, and Gordy was gone.

VC: Where had Gordy gone?

EP: Well, he went back to – well, no, actually what he did was he was part of a group of radicals at UCLA that were not affiliated with any political organization, so they basically were a cooperative, or collective, or something. Really bright guys, very democratic, socialist minded. And they decided to industrialize, to go into –

VC: Really. Like get into a factory?

EP: U.S. Steel, yeah, which was in Bellflower, Downey I think. They moved there, and they were – Gordy's a really big, strong guy, and he's very down-to-earth, so he was I'm sure a very popular guy, and funny and all that. A very popular guy among the workers. And they had a basketball team. The Ash Grove was the sponsor of the basketball team. They had little tee shirts. I went to two of their games.

VC: Wow. You don't have any of those tee shirts left, do you?

EP: Well, Gordy would. You'll have to talk with him.

VC: That'd be a find.

EP: Gordy might. Yeah, that would be – (laughs) It was hilarious, actually. I was slightly embarrassed.

VC: Why?

EP: I don't know. I mean, it just – I was there at a basketball game and the announcer said, "We have on the premises the sponsor of the Ash Grove Wonders," or whatever their name was. Ask him what their name was. I can't remember.

VC: That's hilarious. Wow.

EP: They lost. (both laugh) What can I say? They're all great. I mean, all these brilliant – some of the best students at UCLA, going and becoming steel workers. (laughs) No, it was great. It was important. And a number of them stayed in that part of the county and built lives there. Gordy then – he already had – well, he has everything for his Ph.D. except the dissertation. He never finished that. So he's the head of the union at Glendale College now. I told you that before. Well anyway, so all of the – Sandy Getz had become my third wheel.

VC: Who?

EP: Sandy Getz. She was a waitress in the early sixties, then the head waitress, and very quickly my assistant. Without her, more than probably – well, I don't know, more than anybody else aside from maybe Gordy, just through a number of crises, she just – I couldn't have gone on. I mean, after the first fire she _____, and we talked to our landlord and he was cool. Partly because Sandy was there. She's very pretty, very charming, and very businesslike. She was much more businesslike than me, much more.

VC: Good for her.

EP: She was a balance. And we had a personal relationship also, but – anyway, she was really a very close friend. She died of cancer about, oh I don't know, it's ten years now. Very sad. And she really went into alcohol and drugs and everything. She sort of wasted her – wasted away for a while. Yeah, she did. She screwed up. Anyway, so I was sort of without a kilter and it just –

VC: You mean after the second fire?

EP: Yeah. I was improvising. We got into – I don't know, it's really hard to talk about it, but I – it was so complicated, with personal relationships, and I was drinking, and so on. And I was really angry at this one waitress who kept coming in late. Her mother was also a waitress, and I just – she came in late again, and I just was really p.o.'d at her and told her to go home, or something.

Then another waitress, somebody who never liked me. I realized as soon as she was hired I had made a mistake. Or whoever hired her had made a mistake. But in any event, so she began berating me and I stupidly – after the second fire, because that had happened to a number of people and there were a number of people on the Left who started taking martial arts, so that's when I got into karate, in '72, in karate. So I kicked a door, and she made that into a huge incident.

Long story short, a pretty small group of waitresses – like I think there were four out of an employee staff of fifteen or sixteen, or something like that – kept trying to agitate, and they wound up getting support from the Communist Party in starting a union and started picketing, just when I was starting to do something around the Hazard strike. That was deliberate, just to do it to see if they could stop the whole – with Hazel Dickens and Alice Gerard and George – the saving thing was that the artists were out in front wondering what to do, and I came up and

immediately two or three of the waitresses came up and said, "Ed, how could you do that? Why don't you apologize to the –" (laughs) And it was so clear it was a personal thing. It was not – whatever. And we didn't have any money. I mean, the Ash Grove, if anything, had less money. We were on hand-to-mouth then. Times were really tough. I made nothing.

Then the one person that I had hired to be assistant manager, who was very close to the Communist Party, even though he thought they were insane to go out initially. I won't even say his name. It just got me so angry. That rotten louse. He went to their meetings. He said that I was hiding money, that obviously I had money. I mean, he knew – he was the bookkeeper – he knew that there was no money, he knew it. He lied to them. And they had a Communist Party union organizer with – anyway. And the crazy thing is that the union they were trying to join was the union represented by my close friend and attorney, Steven Reinhart, now one of the eminent –

VC: Yeah, right.

EP: Anyway, Steven. And I had forgotten which – whatever, and at a certain point I called Steven, and he said, "Oh, my God. Ed, I think you've called me –" He said, "Well, that shouldn't be – gee, that sounds – give me a minute." So he called me back about an hour later and said, "Ed, what you didn't know, or you didn't tell me, or whatever, is that, unfortunately, I happen to be representing the union." (laughs) So Steven didn't know what to do. I didn't know what to do. So Steven called a meeting at his office. He was working then for Bogle & Fogel[?]. He had initially worked for – I said before, something & Myers. They're a real huge firm. Anyway, by then he was working for Bogle & Fogel, a labor law group.

What had happened was that all of the rest of the lawyers – and I called up my friend Barbara Dorman, who became Barbara Boyle and one of the founders of Orion Pictures. Barbara started – was my assistant, you might say. She and Martin Cohen, who headed the Ash Grove kitchen, had started – they went through law school working. Right at the beginning they were the – anyway. They had started a law firm representing Frank Zappa and a bunch of things. So they represented a lot of – so anyway, they took on the case. Basically, they asked the other employees what they wanted to do and said that they could fight that by organizing a separate union. So they started organizing a separate union.

Then Steven – at that point, I called in – or whatever. Somehow Steven called a meeting. We went in, and then all of the people who had known each other and had been friends until about two months, three months earlier started asking how's this and that, _____ this one or that one. (laughs) And Steven came in and he said, "I have to say, I've never seen anything like this in my life." (laughs) It was like sort of a release of tension. Anyway, so he tried to resolve it, and basically he called me in privately, about a month later, and said that if they organize a union it's going to set a precedent and it's going to really harm the whole union movement in Los Angeles.

I mean, maybe he was – he probably was right. Steven, I don't think he'd lie to me. I really believe that, that it would set a precedent because it was so overwhelming. And it would just mean that the union of restaurant workers and whatever that they were representing, the AFL/CIO, could be overturned, and somehow that would start something. And I felt terrible about it. So I said, "I'm

not going to talk them out of doing what they want to do. You should talk with them. So a day later they simply dropped them, and that was the end of the thing.

That was a horrible experience. I mean, it was just part of the disintegration of the milieu around the Ash Grove, because they were – to me, it made it not worth it going on. So I was just treading water. I needed something else, so that's when I began thinking of that music at that point. This was before the punk movement that happened four years later. There was nothing happening. Like I said, Holly Near, at the end of '72, reminded me of just a kind of excitement.

I'm reading today's *L.A. Times*. The thing I miss – one of the things I miss, maybe the most important thing I miss about the Ash Grove, is that here is finally an article on a huge number of new African musicians, and immediately I want to hear them. I heard Miriam Makeba, I heard Robby _____, all these people before they became ultra-famous. I heard – Camillo _____, the _____ player, was on that level. And _____, an Iraqi group player – come to think of it, he was Iraqi.

So I had all this international music that was incredible, I mean simply incredible. And if I knew of people like this that were covered in this thing, I would be calling the writers the next day, and they would be – I'd do my best to – and at that time, I could have, obviously, if I knew about them, I would have hired them, happily. It would be great. So that's the part I miss about it.

But anyway, none of that was happening at that point. And everyone was kind of settling. Jane Fonda was going to do a film series and be there. So I was going to diversify, and I could get some talks and some music. But I had to do something, and that was kind of what I was hoping to do at the beginning of the

next year. And then we were burned down on November 11. So that's basically – that's what played out.

VC: And that was November of '73?

EP: Yeah. November 11th. Two years to the day after Salvadore Allende was killed, the first September 11th.

VC: Was it by the same group?

EP: No. Salvadore Allende and –

VC: No, no. When you –

EP: Oh, no, no, no. It was different people.

VC: And you were drinking at that time, too?

EP: Mm-hmm.

VC: It's hard to – I can't picture it. And you hadn't grown up drinking?

EP: No. Then I went into it seriously. I took a ten-year vacation.

VC: When you say "drinking," I mean, I don't want to prod, but would you wake up and have a drink?

EP: Maybe. When I stopped, I was kind of guided by a very hard-nosed friend of mine, Mary Lou Johnson, who was a doper and alcoholic herself. The first thing she did was give me a whole bunch of vitamins, and the next thing she said is, "Now go home, and I want you to look for every bottle that you have in the house." It was unbelievable. I found about ten bottles over a period of two weeks. I didn't even remember where I'd put things. But that was '84, so it's been twenty-five years. In July, it'll be – July 15th, I think, it'll be twenty-five years that I haven't touched – but anyway, from that time – I mean, it really accelerated, of course, when I wasn't

doing – I mean, I did concerts, but I was going on instinct, I mean learned instinct. It's not instinct. Whatever it is. Learned behavior.

I knew what to do because I had known what to do for so long, but it wasn't – I mean, I did some incredible stuff when I was drunk. It was just amazing. I started off with a reception for the – no, that was later on. No. The first thing I think I did was – I had been producing the Mime Troupe at the Ash Grove, the San Francisco Mime Troupe.

VC: Oh, really. They're great.

EP: Started in '67 and was very close with them. So I produced – Bertolt Brecht had done an adaptation of Gorky's novel *The Mother*. So we did that at a big theater, the Fox Venice, that seated eight hundred and fifty. We sold it out for a full week. And everyone came. What's the name of that really famous drama teacher?

VC: The guy who was in the – he taught everybody – he was a method actor?

EP: Yeah. Well, Jane Fonda brought him.

VC: That's going to kill me. I was just thinking about him the other day. He was in *The Godfather II*, right?

EP: I don't know.

VC: East Coast guy?

EP: Yeah, I guess. It was a major – and we sold out every show. It was eight hundred seats for a theater, which is really pretty good, at that time. And things like that. I kept doing that sort of thing, and I also had – just right after the Ash Grove closed, because I viewed it as sort of a continuation of what had happened to Allende, just a collapse of democratic betterment of society. And the Ash Grove was deliberately – it was arson. The fire department proved it.

So I joined something called Los Angeles Group for Latin American Solidarity. It was the only Latin American anything group, and it was mostly professors. They met at the – on Hilgard, there's – I forget the name of the building, but it was sort of a space where people could meet, and so on. And that was where they met. Because a number of Chilean – first of all, I got involved right away in trying to – I thought it would be a great idea to salvage the music that had grown up around the Chilean Democratic Socialist Movement, Victor Hadda and _____, and all of the – _____, _____, and all of those people. And most of them, aside from Victor, were not caught and were out of the country, I mean on tour, when they were – and Tim Harding and Don Bray and the other great people in LAGLAS, the acronym, knew them, or had contact with people – the guy who was Allende's cultural ambassador, consul, was somebody who lived here in Los Angeles.

So anyway, because I knew how to put on concerts, and they had contact and they wanted to do that. And I was already into the Chilean music. I had already heard Violeta Parra and just adored her, the woman who began the Latin American New Song, *Nueva Cancion*. So I produced one great artist after another and it very quickly expanded to people from Ecuador, Mexico, Brazil, just progressive Latin American artists. And because I had this vehicle, all these professors from all different schools, and we just kept having full houses and all that. So I did all of that while I was drunk.

VC: When you say "drunk" –

EP: I mean, well, I was drinking a lot. Fortunately, I also fell in love with somebody who was a wonderful, wonderful designer, graphic designer. She did some just

extraordinary flyers and symbols and things like that. We worked together a lot and stuff.

VC: Why didn't you want to reopen the Ash Grove?

EP: Well, initially, I just wanted to escape. Then in about '77, somebody else brought that up to me, actually. Art Kunkin, the guy that still was running the *Los Angeles Free Press*. So we had a couple of meetings with different people. But it was mostly sort of beatnik hippie types. I mean, I didn't feel comfortable with it. He wanted me to – there was a group called La MaMa, or something like that, in New York and he wanted to – so this and that. I just left it alone for a while. So there was discussion of that early on, and then not. And it took until about – until after I stopped drinking. I would have been incapable of really doing that. It really wasn't – I don't know, it was sort of a change, a new audience, a new concept.

But anyway, so I did concerts for a good long time. And I got involved in the New American Movement.

VC: Were you making a living putting on the shows?

EP: Yeah, basically. I would take like ten percent, or something like that, of sales. Just getting by. I managed to get and sell a bunch of the theater seats that were really nice, from the Ash Grove, that were not completely burnt. So I was able to sell them. Just whatever. Oh, yeah, I also worked. I mean, I actually had a job.

VC: Really. Doing what?

EP: Well, I worked in a couple of warehouses, doing stuff. One of them with my friend Ava that I mentioned. And I worked – a friend of mine, in '79, '78 I think, was moving – he was somebody who'd been around the Ash Grove from the beginning, electronic expert, like many of the people I knew from Pasadena. He had audio

engineering associates that he had incorporated, was running from his house. And then it got bigger, really big, and so he moved to another thing. So he called and offered me a job, so I went and helped him move and helped him sort of build what he was doing. And then I worked for him for a couple of years during the time of Three Mile Island.

Then I got a job with Social Public Art Research Center, SPARC, in Los Angeles, in Venice. I did the Great Wall of Los Angeles and a number of other projects. And I was hired – I had known – at that time, Judy Baca was living with Donna Deitch, the filmmaker who really started the lesbian/gay filming thing with *Desert* – I forget the name of it. But she was an Ash Grove person, an Ash Grove girl. She liked to do light shows. One time I walked in the back and there the screen was pulled down, and this girl was dropping things into water and it was reflecting and it was real pretty. (laughs) It made her happy, and nothing was going on anyway, I mean before the shows or whatever. So it was fun.

So she did that, and then she helped put together the first Women's Festival in the United States, ever, in '71. That Jane was part of. I'd become friends with Jane, so she was around. So Donna not only – Donna and Cindy Fitzpatrick, who was one of my waitresses, a friend of Donna's – I think that's how Donna came to the Ash Grove, actually, because Cindy was there. Cindy is now married to somebody. She lives in Beverly Glen. I ran into Donna very recently at a Women in Pink – what's the name of that?

VC: Oh, Code Pink.

EP: Yeah, at a Code Pink Christmas party. I went with Michelle Shocked to that. It was great.

VC: They're great. I like Code Pink.

EP: Yeah, me too. Donna was there and it was great to see her, and we had a really good talk. So, Donna was living with Judy Baca at that time, and Donna had prevailed upon Judy to do not only murals but to do performances around Venice. So I was hired to help with different things, art projects they were doing, like the Great Wall. But mainly to – I finally figured out what to do, which was to do both a photographic exhibit of the various communities of Venice, and also show their culture, sort of what I'm trying to do with Beyond November and what I did at the Ash Grove with the beatnik culture, the Jewish culture, the blacks, the browns. And it was a spectacular exhibit that actually was documented because Linda Ebert did all the photography, and somebody else – it's on the Web. I can show it to you.

VC: Oh, yeah. That'd be great. And you were living in Venice at the time?

EP: Yeah, I was living in Venice. I'd moved to Venice just a couple of months – the Ash Grove burned down on November 11th. On January 1st, '74, I started to live in Venice. I stayed there until '90, actually, the end of '89. January 1st, 1990, I moved to Echo Park for the first time. I stayed there for like three years and then I moved to Venice and around. Anyway, I'm back here now. So I did do work.

VC: It sounds like you were very active.

EP: Well, yeah. And I was drinking at the same time. But I did do – I'm creative, so I did work. I mean, some people are drunk and – I mean, look at all the Irish writers. It's really amazing. But you can't remember everything when you're drinking. (laughs) That's why they're such great storytellers, because they have this incredible creative essence, and they can get lost in their own insides. That happens when you're a drunk. (laughs)

VC: Like you were just drinking, and then doing all this.

EP: Yeah.

VC: Wow. What made you stop drinking?

EP: Two things, both of them the same thing. We were going to watch basketball at – there was a whole group of – mostly guys, but guys and women, who watched sports or would play football at halftime, or whatever. Most of the women, our women, left and went hiking, or did something else more beneficial. (laughs) But there were a few women that liked sports, too.

Anyway, I was at one of the things, and they were passing around a joint and I couldn't hold it. And I realized that everyone was looking at me, so I realized that that was – and I literally couldn't coordinate my fingers to hold the joint. And then, in the same week, I was walking down the boardwalk and I looked down and I realized I had no control over where I was stepping, where I was walking. This, as an athlete, somebody who's always valued my coordination and all of that, that was too much.

So I called my friend, Steve Clair, and told him what I was going through and asked him who could maybe help me. He suggested two people. The first guy was the doctor that founded the Venice Family Clinic, that's now in the *L.A. Times* a couple of times in the last couple days. And the other one was Mary Lou Johnson, whom I knew as a fellow community activist in sort of a broad group that we had of friends that were doing stuff, but would also – they helped me put on different things.

So I went to Mary Lou and she told me she suspected I was drinking, one of the few people, but she was a drunk herself and she knew exactly what I was going

through. She was wonderful. She gave me all this stuff. I started telling her all my troubles, and she said, "Oh, I don't want to hear it." (laughs) "Here. Take vitamins, go find all the bottles, join AA, and then I'll talk to you." So I did all that.

VC: So no one knew you were drinking?

EP: No. My girlfriend.

VC: Wow. How'd you keep that hidden?

EP: Well, I didn't drink in front of people. I almost have never gone to a bar in my life. I just drank at home.

VC: That's interesting to me.

EP: I started out really as a very fit person, so it took a long time to really wear me down. And I'd start feeling sick in my liver and stuff like that. That would jolt me and I'd – but the two things that – it was too much. I realized that if I didn't stop, I was in serious physical, emotional, and epochal trouble. It was the end of me. Whatever. I didn't want to take that next step, follow that next level where you have no control over it. So I did what I had to do. As soon as I stopped, I mean within three or four weeks, I just – I don't know if it was that soon, but I very rapidly got in the habit of not drinking. I just have never had the desire to do that ever again.

VC: You didn't fall off the wagon or have –

EP: Never. Never. In fact, I went to three or four AA meetings and stopped because it was – I had been – in 1967 and '66, my wife had become a teacher at a dance – teaching dance, but also teaching children in Synanon. We were living in Ocean Park for a year. We sold the Hollywood house. Anyway, it doesn't matter. So as part of that, one of the things that – you know, you join the Synanon game.

VC: What is Synanon? I don't know anything about it.

EP: Well, it was a very important anti-drug, anti-alcohol treatment program, founded by a guy named Chuck Diedrich. And it became a cult around Chuck. But during its great period, it had hundreds of people and they developed what they called the game, which was that you had to be incredibly honest about yourself, and you were under the merciless perceptions and merciless probing of people who knew all of your weakness, and who knew when you were full of shit, and when you were doing things. Then they'd go off and everyone would dance together.

And they had bought this very big building at the very end of Pico Boulevard, on the left side. There's this huge building, with a big swimming pool, with a big hotel in the old days. So they had that building there for about ten years. That's where hundreds of people lived, in the hotel. They had so many musicians that they had a full band, like a twelve, fifteen, twenty piece band of great musicians that were all being cured of their evil habits. Then they'd go on and they'd play great music. We had great dances and everything like that.

So when I joined AA, where the only thing you did is sort of give your story, but there was no real exposure and no real rehabilitation, it was like second, third rate compared to what I'd seen in Synanon, and what it did for me, personally, even at that time, before I was drinking or anything. But I saw what it did to people. It was just wonderful.

VC: So you and your wife were in Synanon?

EP: Yeah. Well, I mean, no. We went to the – no. We didn't live there. We lived four blocks away, six blocks away to be exact.

VC: But why were you –

EP: Because she was teaching there, and they expected all the teachers to undergo the same –

VC: To do the game?

EP: Yeah, do the game. So we did.

VC: So it was like an encounter group?

EP: Yes, exactly. But with a huge number of people and various – there would be a weekend session. After a day of not sleeping, or very little sleeping, and you're still playing the game, a lot of your defenses just drop down completely and people just start exposing themselves and their histories and what they – and the thing is, there was no judgment beyond that. And they were extremely close with each other. It was, on some level, a very wonderful experience. I have mostly really just amazing memories of that, and still know people – like this guy, Bill Maher, who is on television?

VC: Mm-hmm.

EP: His brother, John, was in there. I knew John extremely well, and his wife. Anyway, so when I went into AA – I must have told you that my first meeting – they take a break where you have coffee, and so on. The first break at my first meeting, about six or seven people came up to me to say hello and to tell me that the Ash Grove was the first place they ever had a drink. (both laugh) I'm serious. And almost every one of them – I mean, I don't know if it was true or not – said that they got in for free, or told me some story of – whatever. But they were all real happy to see me. That happened almost every meeting I went to. I just went to a few of them.

VC: So after that you stopped drinking.

EP: Yeah. I had stopped and that was the end of it. It's like another chapter. I just really wanted to change. After a very short while, it didn't take any nerves of steel or anything to prevent my – I don't know whether I'm an alcoholic or not. I don't care. I don't drink.

VC: So then, after that, when did you start the Ash Grove again? That wasn't till the nineties, right?

EP: Well, in '88 I put on shows at a place on the corner of Santa Monica and Highland, which is now a storage thing, a very big thing. It was a photography studio and outfit, with a huge amount of unused space. I don't know what it had been before, but there were really big rooms, and like two or three theater-size spaces, and so on. And I put on stuff in one space that held like – you could put a hundred and fifty people in there. So I did that. Lucinda Williams played, and a number of other people.

Balancing from that I did the – I was still hoping to buy that building, and the *L.A. Weekly*, which was not that far away, was interested in – Jay Levin, the original founder of the *L.A. Weekly* came over. We talked. He was interested in maybe buying the building and sharing it with the Ash Grove, which would have been, of course, a perfect situation.

VC: Which building was this?

EP: Well, it was the building on the corner of Highland and Santa Monica.

VC: Oh, that one building.

EP: Yeah. So I started that, and I decided – I mentioned to a couple of people that the thirtieth anniversary of the Ash Grove was coming up in '88. So it must have been '87, '86 or something. Then everyone got interested in my doing the thirtieth

anniversary of the Ash Grove, so we did it at the Wiltern Theater. We had David Crosby and the Byrds reunion, Roger McGuinn, David Crosby.

VC: Were the Byrds a big Ash Grove band?

EP: They started at the Ash Grove. But Roger played his first professional engagement as opening act for the Limeliters in '61 or – he was Jim McGuinn at that time. He changed his name to Roger. He joined some religion or something and changed his name. And he married an Ash Grove waitress, Delores DeLeon, who became _____. And – I forget the name of the other Byrd. And then we also – oh, Chris Hilman, what am I talking about. Of course. Then there was another Byrd, but they didn't want to play with him. He came to the concert. I can't remember – I think he died. I'm pretty sure he died. Something was wrong with him. And Willie Dixon played. I think that was the last time he played publicly. And he was excellent. He brought a group of musicians, and his grandson, who was a pianist, and it was really good. And Bernie and Barbara Dane and Wanda Coleman, the poet.

VC: Did she read poetry there?

EP: Yeah. And the country thing, David Lindley and Richard Green played traditional music. Then Richard played with his more sort of classical quartet, including his wife Margaret, but based on folk themes. And Billy Ray Latham of the Kentucky Colonels had a band. He was living in San Diego at the time and had a bluegrass band. Bernie Pearl. Anyway, it was really – we had two nights, one more or less country with the Byrds, and more blues with Barbara Dane and Willie Dixon and Bernie. So we had two – Friday night and Saturday. It was really good.

At that time, I really knew that the possibility of opening that club on Santa Monica and Highland, without the funding of the *L.A. Weekly*, wouldn't happen, and they had already dropped out. Jay was losing control of the *L.A. Weekly* and it just wasn't in the cards for him to make a decision like that. So that ended it. There were some hard feelings with Lindley and Green. Oh, yeah, and the Chambers Brothers. Lester Chambers really has never forgiven me because I had told him that if we managed to get the club on Santa Monica and Highland going that they would have shares in that. That's what they were playing for basically. They wanted to do it anyway, but I mean that was something I wanted to give them. Well, it didn't happen.

And Lester for sure thought when I started the Ash Grove in '95 that he should have gotten some shares of that. Of course, it was a completely different thing, and there was a corporation where people bought shares and I had absolutely no anything to go around giving shares. It didn't even occur to me to do that. I didn't even realize that. And probably, I think that Lindley and Richard sort of, I think, felt the same, because I haven't seen them. I was going to – David was supposed to play the Ash Grove on the pier, but it closed before the group could play where I had a chance to talk to him. I haven't really spoken to him in all this time. Some day I will.

Our very close mutual friend, John Lyon, has moved back to Los Angeles, so I just am now again in touch with another person you should talk with. L-y-o-n.

VC: Who is he?

EP: John Lyon is another brilliant technical person from Pasadena. Wes Dooley's close friend, Dave Lindley's close friend. They're all super-bright.

VC: Someone else from – what's that school? Is that a Cal Tech person?

EP: He could be, but he's never had any ambition. So he just is very smart and is a great acoustic engineer, and knows electronics. Now he's designing websites and whatever else comes along. We just talked. This woman – I recently joined Facebook because Frank Hamilton –

VC: Oh, you're on Facebook.

EP: Yeah. This musician named me as a friend, and just because it was Frank I said yeah. And before I know it, eight million people are wanting to be my friend, including – one of them, who's from – whatever – we have one friend in common. And she made a message that she's a friend of John Lyon, so I answered her back and then she gave me John's phone number and I called him last weekend and we talked for an hour. It was great.

VC: Yeah. Facebook's really interesting. I don't know. I don't have enough time in my life to really pay attention to it.

EP: Nor do I. I sent one message to everybody, saying that I'm happy to be your friend, but I have no idea why you want to be my friend. And one guy said, "I don't know why I want to be your friend. Somebody says you –" (laughs) All right. But a lot of them, even if they don't know me, are saying they're playing their banjo or a musical instrument, or all that. So it's going around the music world.

VC: Interesting. Great. So just around the trajectory, so you were doing shows on the corner of Santa Monica and Highland, then you have the thirty year reunion.

EP: Yeah. And then shortly after that the prospective enterprise folded.

VC: And then you found a place on the pier?

EP: Yeah, right. And then I had in my political – when I was living in Venice, '76, '77, after the Ash Grove had closed, I got involved with – it was interesting because I already sort of had a pretty firm socialist conviction and all that. The only group I ever had been involved with was the International Socialists for a short period. It was called the Independent Socialists at the time, for less than a year, back in '69, I think.

I sort of became friends through New American Movement with Dorothy Healy, who had quit the Communist Party, and got kicked out, right after she quit over the – but she'd really quit before – over the Khrushchev disclosures and all that. But it took her a while to get out. And then she joined New American Movement, and I joined at the same time. It was like people taking a second wind, or something like that. And because all the old political stuff was discredited, including the Communist Party and so on. And she joined with Ben Dobbs and Ben Margolis and other people that had been part of the Communist Party. I mean, sort of intellectual leadership. Dorothy was the titular head of the Southern California Communist Party, and Ben Dobbs was the organizational head. So Ben was like the organizer and Dorothy was the voice and the face of the party, the spokesperson. You know, the brilliant speaker, and so on. So I became friends with both of them. It was interesting because it was a friendship that – we had differences, whatever, and I wasn't coming to them as an acolyte or anything of that sort.

Anyway, Dorothy asked me if I would drive her to this meeting of – what is Tom Hayden's group? CDC. I think so. I can't remember the – that was his base. And he and Jane, they had married, and he and Jane Fonda had this property up in

Santa Barbara. She wanted to go there, and for some reason she didn't drive, so she asked if I would drive her up there and we'd have a chance to talk, and this and that. So I did. When I was up there – I'd been living in Venice, and I was very active. There was this woman, Ruth – now she's Ruth Goldway but she was Ruth Yannatta then. She was going to run for assembly against Mel Levine.

This whole thing where she announced her candidacy, I spoke and I said the reality is, I'm a very active person. I'd never heard of her, I'm sorry to say. Whatever. It was the different between grass roots and somebody who moved into the district to do that, but who was supported by Tom Hayden and all of the blah, blah, blah, all of the right people and this organization. So I said I'd have to know more about your candidacy, and so on and so forth. So she and her husband Derek, who wound up being the ambassador to Finland under Bill Clinton – and Ruth it turned out went to Yale with Hillary, or Harvard, wherever they went, and was an old friend of hers.

And because it was different. I mean, it was not – it was like they didn't touch a whole bunch of issues that either NAM, New American Movement, or International Socialists would discuss, or anything. And it was just strictly – it was a quote/unquote "political" organization in terms of electoral. But very bright people, and so on, and nice people. So I grudgingly – I went to a couple of meetings, and before you know it, a couple of people knew me, and so on and so forth. And I guess – I joined.

VC: And this was while you were hanging out with the New American Movement as well, right?

EP: Yeah. And so was Dorothy. I mean, Dorothy planned the whole time, I guess, to get New American Movement into the Democratic Party, as a progressive block within the Democratic Party, which I never – that never even occurred to me until after it was almost a reality. And they used their good old communist tricks of – I mean, they didn't consider it a trick, but they were having once a month meetings, breakfast meetings, at a particular restaurant, whatever, and discussing how to push in that direction. And knowing full well that a lot of people were independent but just had to be quote/unquote "educated," and they were the ones of course going to do the education. When push came to shove, I fought against that, and when it happened anyway, a whole bunch of us went into the Citizens Party and Barry Commoner – that included Michelle Pritchard and a number of other people.

VC: Right. I need to get a hold of her.

EP: Yeah. Well, I'll give you her phone number. I mean, in two seconds. So I did that. And how does that relate – oh, yeah. One of the guys that I became friends with was a guy named Denny Zane, an extremely bright guy. He also had come to the Ash Grove as a kid and all that. While we were there – what caused me to quit that organization, and a number of others, three others – four of us had – one of us was – I can't even remember who, who was one of us – was contacted by a guy named Sid Rhodes[?], who was trying to organize tenants in Santa Monica. All elderly.

We went to the meeting and it was all retired people, and they were explaining the situation of how the rents were being raised, and so on and so forth. So we wanted to organize a renters league, so that's what we wanted to do. The four people, four of us from Tom's group, were Denny Zane, who wound up being the mayor of Santa Monica and is an expert in all kinds of electoral stuff and in rent

control and all of this kind of stuff. He's a consultant. Parke Skelton, who is now one of the major campaign consultants in America. And Moe _____, who's a Venice guy and also – he sort of leads two lives. He has led two or three lives, actually. But one of them is being an activist but always connected with electoral organizing and things like that. He helped put Ruth – the name of the other – I can't even remember her name, but a woman who was in the city council for a long time. Anyway, it doesn't matter.

So we did that. We said that our chapter, which met in Tom and Jane's – they had a house in the back that would be a meeting space – and we got the chapter to vote on our proposal, to agree to it. Well, Tom Hayden managed to bring the issue to a regional council where of course there were four people, or something like that, and they put the kibosh on the whole thing. So we voted again for it, and then we all went to the regional meeting. And then he managed to get a statewide meeting. He wanted to do – I can't remember – CalSun I think, or something like that. Something involved with the environment and sun panels and whatnot. And he did not want to get into the thing. So we ran candidates and lost that election.

Well, the next year, Tom, having lost SunCal, took over the – I can't remember what the name of it is, but anyway, that group basically put forward their own thing and then somehow legitimated the renters group. That still exists now in Santa Monica. But we were so pissed off about it, the three of us quit CED. That was it, CED, Council for Economic Democracy. We quit CED and only Denny remained, and he became the mayor of Los Angeles. Parke and Moe and I went another way. So that was that story.

So I get a phone call from Denny when he was mayor saying, "Yeah, there's this great space that's going to be open on the pier. This theater group's been using this space." And this was like in 1990, 1991. So I went – no. He said, "I want to show you around different spaces." Santa Monica was just – the Third Street Promenade was just going to be opening, you know, that year where they changed it to a walk street and all of that. So we went there. And it was already too commercial for my taste. Then he said, "Okay. Then there is a space on the pier that you might like." I mean, after showing me all of the commercial spaces. I just loved it the minute I saw it. And that's the space we took. So that's the story. We can probably stop now. It's four o'clock.

[end]